Statement of Mark P. Brewer, A.A.E.
President and CEO, Rhode Island Airport Corporation
To The
House Homeland Security Subcommittee on
Economic Security, Infrastructure Protection and Cybersecurity
"Improving Management of the Aviation Screening Workforce"
July 28, 2005

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I come before you today appreciative of the opportunity to discuss ways of improving management of the aviation screening workforce.

My name is Mark Brewer. I am the President and CEO of the Rhode Island Airport Corporation, a quasi-governmental entity which operates a six-airport system including T.F. Green Airport (also known as "Providence"), a medium hub, air carrier airport serving nearly six (6) million passengers per year. I have been involved in the airport management industry for over 30 years. I have also been involved airport security as the airport member of the FAA's Security Equipment Integrated Product Team (SEIPT) and an industry representative to the TSA's Security Technology Deployment Office (STDO), further, I was co-chair of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) Security Committee, and served four years on AAAE's Board of Directors. I currently serve on the Association's Policy Review Committee.

Today I will address three issues:

1) <u>Improving Management of the Workforce</u>: I commend the committee for recognizing the need to study the management of the aviation screening workforce. The ever-changing leadership in TSA, multiple/changing priorities, funding limitations and centralized control of staffing decisions makes our national screening process inefficient.

2) <u>Technology Enhancements</u>: Enhancements in technology are essential. Improvements to both the screening checkpoint technology and a greater priority on installing integrated EDS systems are very important to both enhanced security, greater customer service and reduced threats.

3) <u>Opt out program</u>: Employee performance of TSA screeners in Providence has been excellent. The TSA employees have received a 100% recertification rating for the past three years running. The "Opt-Out" program, as currently structured, exposes the airport operator to potential liability by associating the airport directly with the screening checkpoint or EDS operation, yet provides the airport no input into the operational decisions of the screening process.

Allow me to address each of these points in greater detail.

First, **improving management of the workforce**.

As TSA has transitioned from Undersecretary to Undersecretary the priorities, personnel and indeed the organizational structure of have changed. It has become an industry joke about the revolving door at TSA. If you don't like the answer you get on an issue, just wait, perhaps the next (you fill in the position) will have a different point of view.

Let me be clear, TSA has a massive job to undertake. I recognize and appreciate the depth and breadth of their role in all of our lives but especially as an airport administrator. The TSA has worked diligently to keep lines of communication open with regularly scheduled telcons. TSA has an open door policy with aviation associations and airports to receive input into projects and security enhancements.

Yet, TSA does not delegate authority for maintaining staffing levels at each airport to the local Federal Security Directors (FSD). In Providence there are at vacancies which remain unfilled until TSA HQ gives authority to fill them. The FSD is required to use an assessment center located 60 miles from the airport requiring any local applicants to trek to this location in order to potentially have the privilege to work for the TSA. The assessment center in Chelsea, Massachusetts, outside of Boston, while physically there, has no staff assigned to it to do assessing. While there is no official hiring freeze, TSA has elected not to hire. The net result is there are positions for screeners open in Providence with no authority or staff available to hire personnel for these positions. This is clearly an indication to me that a number cruncher has put a halt to the hiring process and consequently security and customer service suffer.

The TSA staffing level in Providence is officially 259 screeners; which is significantly less than the number of screeners called for in the TSA's own Regal model. I have recently learned that the number of screeners in Providence is potentially going to be reduced effective next fiscal year so as to reallocate FTE's to another airport. The passenger traffic in Providence is setting all-time records and we need more screeners, not less.

To meet the current staffing needs our FSD is required to, "Do the dance.", as he calls it; by moving personnel between the checkpoint equipment and lobby installed EDS equipment. Shifting cross-trained personnel between various pieces of equipment and mandatory overtime is the only way he can make it work. One could argue that the FSD should be applauded for his operational effectiveness, and we do. But we also recognize that the reason the dance is necessary at all is because authorized staffing levels are not maintained.

It is my suggestion that TSA HQ delegate the responsibility of maintaining authorized staffing levels to the local FSD. This will assist the FSD in maintaining the staffing levels required for the airport, thus reducing wait times and the unnecessary redistribution of the workforce throughout the day.

While I am on the subject of staffing levels I must share my concerns about the proposals in both the house and senate to reduce funding of the TSA screener staffing levels in the FFY '06 DHS spending budget. I understand these reduced funding levels could eliminate between 2000 to 6000 screening personnel. The only way to reduce personnel in Providence, and I would argue most other airports, is to increase the effectiveness of the technologies available to ensure proper throughput.

The TSA has only nine signed Letters of Intent for funding integrated EDS systems at the approximately 429 air carrier airports with security plans. It will be years, if not decades, before all airports have integrated EDS systems if the funding for these systems remains at current levels.

Providence was recently informed that we are #89 on a list of the top 100 airports to receive LOI monies. Based on the current allocation of funds from the congress we would have to wait decades for funding from the TSA for an integrated system. There is no doubt in my mind that the providing of an integrated EDS system is a federal responsibility. It is not an airport responsibility. It is not an airline responsibility. It is a federal responsibility. Congress needs to step up to the plate in a big way to provide this funding or find creative alternative funding sources for these systems. It will take a large infusion of funds, in the billions, to get this accomplished. I encourage this committee to play a leading role in a congressional commitment to fund integrated EDS systems more aggressively than in the recent years.

Second, **technology enhancements**.

T.F. Green Airport has been on the cutting edge of security technology enhancements. We were a test site for EDS equipment long before September 11 and the creation of the TSA. We were among the first airports in the country to receive screening checkpoint x-rays with the Threat Image Projection (TIP) training program. We were the first airport in the nation to install and operate the screening checkpoint explosive detection device commonly known as "the puffer." We were in the first group of ten airports to test biometric security credentials for airport employees. We are the sponsor of two federal grants testing additional security devices for both enhanced perimeter security and terminal building security.

I am appreciative of TSA's efforts to look into new technology however the process to evaluate and install these technologies is painstakingly slow.

But more to the point of this hearing, it is essential that congress understand that TSA's introduction of security technology is the way to reduce the manpower requirements. If, in fact, congress concurs that a TSA goal is to offer, "World Class Security along with World Class Customer Service" then it can only do so with a heavy reliance on technology. As mentioned earlier, Congress' proposed reduction in TSA's FFY '06 screener staffing budget will potentially reduce the number of screeners by 2000 – 6000 FTE's. These reductions in staffing can only reasonably be replaced if new processes and technologies are created to provide screening checkpoint customer throughputs similar to or above today's traffic volumes. Not to replace personnel with technology will create longer lines and thus additional terrorist targets in our terminals.

I encourage Congress to maintain world class security as the priority while understanding that customer service is a must.

I would be remiss if I did not re-emphasize the federal government's obligation to fund the integration of Explosive Detection Systems (EDS) into airport terminal buildings. Integrated EDS systems reduce the level of threat in the terminal because all bags are screened behind the scenes sooner, enhanced technologies such as "on-screen resolution" make the examination of the bags more efficient, allow passengers to get into the secure side of the terminal sooner and save the American taxpayers money. While the

dollars committed to the integration of EDS systems are in the hundreds of millions of dollars each year, the reality is that it will take billions of dollars to complete these projects. I understand Congress has been researching alternative financing mechanisms for this purpose. To the best of my knowledge no creative funding solutions have been developed thus the full integration of EDS systems could take decades at the current rate.

Congress must recognize that additional threats are created by the imposition of the "short-term", lobby-installed, EDS solution. Congress appears to have no plan of how to fund the long-term integrated EDS solution. It will take time, dollars and a commitment from congress to provide TSA the resources to accomplish this mission.

Again, back to staffing levels, it has been proven that integrated EDS systems will save TSA and the federal government significant dollars in personnel costs. I understand one GAO study demonstrates money invested in integrated EDS systems is paid back in one year through personnel-related savings. I appears to me that the solution is obvious, let's work together to get it done.

Third, **Opt-out Program**:

While I have no objection to the creation of an opt-out program for those airports who feel they would gain some benefit, I personally see no advantage based on the current structure of the program. There are four main points I would like to make:

1) Both the TSA screeners and privatized screeners are recruited and hired from the same pool of candidates. They are paid the same, trained the same, as well as, tested and reevaluated using the exact same criteria. They use the exact same equipment in the performance of their duties.

2) For an airport operator to enter into an agreement with the TSA for the services of a private screening firm would imply both publicly and politically that the airport operator itself has some obligation in the screening of passengers and bags before they gain access to commercial air carriers. Passengers would also assume that an obligation exists, through its vendor, that the airport itself insures the safety and security of their aircraft as they proceed aboard. The liability issues are enormous; not one that I could recommend to our Board of Directors that we accept. Knowing that TSA selects the screening company, provides the airport no flexibility on the utilization of staff, and offers no control over operational issues provides me no incentive to consider this as a viable option.

3) There has been no conclusive evidence presented to me which indicates that private firms exceed the security detection capabilities of the TSA employees currently performing these important government-regulated functions. The screeners at PVD have passed their recertification tests at 100% proficiency for the past three years in a row. It is difficult to argue that security will be enhanced by utilizing employees merely because their check is signed by a private firm vs. the U.S. Government. Again, I am not stating that I am opposed to the opt-out program in general. It is just a long way from being enticing for this airport operator to agree to take on the additional

responsibilities and liabilities related with aviation security without the capability to actually manage the program.

4) TSA's staffing of the congressionally-capped screening force can be better accomplished in one very important way; empower the Federal Security Directors to maintain a certain FTE manpower level based on the realistic needs of the airport. In Providence, and all other airports, no hiring may be accomplished unless approved by TSA HQ. Washington further provides guidelines on what percentage of part time employees each FSD should have. Again, each airport is different and the local FSD's need to be empowered to manage their staffing levels.

In conclusion, my points are these:

1) The TSA should empower the local FSD's to maintain their authorized staffing levels. This step alone will enable those on the front lines to be more efficient and insure a higher level of customer service. Further, the staffing levels at each airport need to be realistic. As one airport grows and requires additional screener staffing it should not mean that another airport loses staff only to maintain compliance with some national cap.

2) As the industry rebounds from 9/11, passenger volumes grow, and if airport infrastructures remain the same, there will be a requirement for more screeners, not less. However, if the goal is to reduce manpower requirements TSA should only do so only by improving technology. Finding ways to streamline and expedite the introduction of technology into airports is key. One proven way to do so relatively quickly is to appropriately fund the integration of EDS equipment into airports.

3) Continue to explore the issues associated with the privatization "opt-out" program to make it a viable alternative to federal employees for those airport operators which would like to consider it. The liability issues and lack of operational control make it highly unlikely the interest will be there for many airport operators under the current structure of the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views to the Committee.